



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

CASE STUDY

New Media Gives Citizens a Voice

USAID project enables Afghan citizens to benefit from new internet technology



Members of women's organization and other Hirat citizens receive training in how to use a simple video camera at the new Hirat Multimedia Center.

USAID/AMDEP/Internews

CHALLENGE Three decades of war in Afghanistan, exacerbated by poverty, poor infrastructure, and difficult geography, have inhibited the growth of essential services, the commercial sector and, notably, media and communications. While the social media increasingly connects individuals and communities locally, regionally, and internationally in neighboring countries, rural, provincial, and urban communities in Afghanistan are still isolated by a lack of modern communications. Women, in particular, still face many social restrictions on what they can do and where they can go, and for the disabled, there are access limitations.

INITIATIVE To provide an acceptable standard of living for its people, Afghanistan needs a modern economy, integrated with its neighbors and the world economy. Communications is the key to this and new media technology can help overcome many of the barriers to communications in Afghanistan, with its widespread poverty, bad roads and mountainous topography. With implementation by Internews, USAID is working with local communities to bring the internet and new media to ordinary citizens in the provinces of Hirat, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Kandahar. USAID established the first of an emerging network of multimedia centers in the western city of Hirat. The center is managed by a prominent civil-society organization, the Women Activities and Social Services Association. Equipped with ten computers and simple video and audio equipment, the Hirat Multimedia Center will provide internet access, professional assistance, and a range of short training courses for private citizens, small businesses, and civil-society organizations.

RESULTS Within days of opening, the new center had about thirty registered users, including private citizens, members of civil-society groups, and students. The center provides short courses in such topics as blogging, website development, and using the internet to find specific information. Roqeya Ahmadi, a member of a local youth group, has already been trained in digital photography and videography. "After three decades of war, multimedia is an effective way to increase our people's knowledge and to expand their vision of what they can do with their lives," said Roqeya.

The new media center provides a gateway to the world that helps in both economic development and social interaction.